

Book Reviews



Idestrom, Rebecca G.S. (2023) *Show Me Your Glory: The Glory of God in the Old Testament*

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For all the worship songs in which we sing of God's glory, I suspect that most people struggle to offer a definition of God's glory—that, or the definitions we do offer are far too limited. All of this is quite understandable when we consider how close the concept of glory is to God's very existence. There will always be a level of mystery in how we talk about God, but that does not mean we should settle for a limited or incomplete understanding.

Enter Rebecca Idestrom's thorough examination of all Old Testament texts that speak to God's glory. A professor of Old Testament at Tyndale University in Toronto, Idestrom brings her expertise to answer some key questions on the topic: What does God's glory reveal about his character, ways, and actions? What role does God's glory play in the biblical narrative? What themes are associated with texts about God's glory? To answer these questions, Idestrom adopts a biblical theological approach that is deeply exegetical in its examination of individual texts, and satisfyingly narrative in its tracing of the individual and collective voice of Israel's experiences of God's glory. This methodology, laid out in the first chapter, serves the study well.

Before entering into the biblical text, Idestrom uses chapter two to survey the key language terms and related imagery and concepts that are utilized in the Old Testament to communicate God's glory. This obviously begins with *kavod*, the most important Hebrew term, but then Idestrom covers a number of Hebrew synonyms that translate to majesty, splendour, honour, beauty, and excellence. There are also a number of terms that are often used together with *kavod*, such as those referring to strength, praise, light, greatness, and wonders. Beyond these terms, Idestrom touches on a number of metaphors, images, and other concepts that are associated with God's glory. This chapter two survey is incredibly helpful in introducing the great breadth of language that will be studied in the biblical text throughout the rest of the book. It also notes that the popular Christian phrase "Shekinah glory" does not appear in the Old Testament.

It is in the subsequent chapters that Idestrom's narrative approach to biblical theology unfolds. God's glory is never explicitly mentioned in Genesis, so chapter three looks at Exodus and how God's glory is closely connected to the act of redemption of Israel. The following chapter four, which examines texts in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, studies how God's glory continues to appear to all the people in crucial moments of their journey, including in moments of judgment. The books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are the focus of the chapter five. While this follows the Christian organization of the Old Testament—not the Hebrew organization of the Tanakh—it is reasonable: Idestrom desires to compare the accounts of God's glory in the Temple from Kings versus from Chronicles, together in one chapter. From there chapter six is devoted to the Psalms, which, perhaps unsurprisingly, contain the most references to the glory of God. While there are verses where it is unclear whether the term



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“glory” refers to God’s, the king’s, or the psalmist’s, Idestrom analyzes nineteen psalms where it is clear that it is God’s glory that is being referred to. The psalms present a rich tapestry of the ways that God’s glory is discussed and how God’s glory elicits a variety of responses.

In chapter seven, Idestrom shows how Isaiah’s writing on God’s glory focusses on two major themes: judgment and salvation. It is here that we also see God’s glory associated with the faithful remnant for the first time. Then looking at Ezekiel in chapter eight, “the prophet of the glory of YHWH,” Idestrom examines some of the most intense descriptions of God’s glory in the Old Testament. Lastly, in chapter nine Idestrom analyzes the prophets of Habakkuk, Haggai, and Zechariah—the only ones in the Book of Twelve that discuss God’s glory—highlighting how these prophets write of it in ways that bring hope and reassurance to the people in difficult times. God’s glory is not explicitly discussed in the remaining books of the Old Testament, though I wonder if it would be fruitful to analyze the language of God’s theophany to Job for connections to divine glory.

In the final chapter, Idestrom brings together the various themes that surfaced throughout her careful study of the biblical text. Taking up the metaphor of James Hamilton, Idestrom shows how God’s glory is like a precious gemstone that has many facets, with each biblical book presenting its own portrait of God’s glory. These portraits include the themes of redemption, protection and provision, tangible signs of God’s presence, judgment, and the role of God’s glory in witness to the world.

This quick summary does not do justice to the depth that Idestrom brings in her exegesis of individual passages, or in her interaction with current scholarly discussions surrounding these texts. For instance, when looking at Isaiah 6, Idestrom provides an excellent survey of the question of how to translate Isaiah 6:3b, before justifying her reading of the verse as “the fullness of the earth is his glory.” Regardless of whether or not you agree with her reading, her survey demonstrates how academic discussion of this verse’s translation serves to better our understanding of God’s glory, and teaches us how we are to approach God and creation. This observation of Idestrom’s writing highlights the great strength of this book: In pursuing academic rigour, the greater purpose of striving to know God’s glory and be changed by it is served. In her preface, Idestrom writes of how her project was prompted by two texts: “Show me your glory” (Exod 33:18) and “transform me by your glory” (2 Cor 3:18). Idestrom has succeeded in catching a glimpse of God’s glory, while also highlighting how it should transform us.

In the end, human language is limited in describing what God is like, because God is indescribable, and incomparable. Still, Idestrom’s careful study of the biblical text will help pastors or students of Scripture catch a glimpse of the multifaceted, mysterious, and moving nature of God’s glory.

Reviewed By:

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